

## Material-Recording, -Scheduling, -Dispatching, and -Distributing Occupations

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### Significant Points

- Many of these occupations are at the entry level and do not require more than a high school diploma.
- Workers develop the necessary skills through on-the-job training lasting from several days to a few months; dispatchers usually require the most extensive training.
- Numerous job openings will arise each year from the need to replace workers who leave this very large occupational group.

### Nature of the Work

Workers in this group are responsible for a variety of communications, recordkeeping, and scheduling operations. Typically, they coordinate, expedite, and track orders for personnel, materials, and equipment.

*Cargo and freight agents* route and track cargo and freight shipments, whether from airline, train, or truck terminals or from shipping docks. They keep records of any missing or damaged items and any excess supplies. The agents sort cargo according to its destination and separate items that cannot be packed together. They also coordinate payment schedules with customers and arrange for the pickup or delivery of freight.

*Couriers and messengers* deliver letters, important business documents, or packages within a firm to other businesses or to customers. They usually keep records of deliveries and sometimes obtain the recipient's signature. Couriers and messengers travel by car, van, or bicycle, or even by foot when making nearby deliveries.

*Dispatchers* receive requests for service and initiate action to provide that service. Duties vary with the needs of the employer. Police, fire, and ambulance dispatchers, also called public-safety dispatchers, handle calls from people reporting crimes, fires, and medical emergencies. Truck, bus, and train dispatchers schedule and coordinate the movement of these vehicles to ensure that they arrive at the appointed time. Taxicab dispatchers relay requests for cabs to individual drivers, tow-truck dispatchers take calls for emergency road service, and utility company dispatchers handle calls related to utility and telephone service. Courier and messenger service dispatchers route drivers, riders, and walkers around a (usually urban) designated area. They distribute work by radio, e-mail, or phone, making sure that service deadlines are met.

*Meter readers* read meters and record the consumption of electricity, gas, water, or steam. They serve a variety of consumers and travel along designated routes to track consumption. Although numerous meters still are read at the house or building that receives the utility's service, many newer meters can be read remotely from a central point. Meter readers also look for evidence of unauthorized utility usage.

*Production, planning, and expediting clerks* coordinate and expedite the flow of information, work, and materials, usually according to a production or work schedule. They gather information for reports on the progress of work and on production problems. They

also may schedule workers or shipments of parts, estimate costs, and keep inventories of materials.

*Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks* track all incoming and outgoing shipments of goods transferred among businesses, suppliers, and customers. These clerks may be required to lift cartons of various sizes. Shipping clerks assemble, address, stamp, and ship merchandise or materials. Receiving clerks unpack, verify, and record information on incoming merchandise. Traffic clerks record the destination, weight, and cost of all incoming and outgoing shipments. In a small company, one clerk may perform all of these tasks. (Postal Service workers sort and deliver mail for the United States Postal Service. While these workers are classified as material-recording, -scheduling, -dispatching, and -distributing workers and are included in the estimate of employment for this occupational group, they are discussed in detail elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

*Stock clerks and order fillers* receive, unpack, and store materials and equipment, and maintain and distribute inventories. In wholesale and retail establishments, inventories may include merchandise; in other kinds of organizations, inventory may include equipment, supplies, or materials. In small firms, stock clerks and order fillers may perform all of the preceding tasks, as well as those usually handled by shipping and receiving clerks. In large establishments, stock clerks and order fillers may be responsible for only one task.

*Weighers, measurers, checkers, and samplers* check and record the weight and measurement of various materials and equipment. They use scales, measuring and counting devices, and calculators to compare weights, measurements, or other specifications against bills or invoices. They also prepare reports on inventory levels.

(This introductory section is followed by sections that provide more detail on cargo and freight agents; couriers and messengers; dispatchers; utility meter readers; production, planning, and expediting clerks; shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks; stock clerks and order fillers; and weighers, measurers, checkers, and samplers.)

### Working Conditions

Working conditions vary considerably by occupation and employment setting. Couriers and messengers spend most of their time alone, making deliveries, and usually are not closely supervised. Those who deliver by bicycle must be physically fit and are exposed to all weather conditions, as well as to the many hazards associated with heavy traffic. Car, van, and truck couriers must sometimes carry heavy loads, either manually or with the aid of a handtruck. They also have to deal with difficult parking situations, as well as traffic jams and road construction. The pressure of making as many deliveries as possible to increase one's earnings can be stressful and may lead to unsafe driving or bicycling practices.

Meter readers, usually working 40 hours a week, work outdoors in all types of weather as they travel through communities and neighborhoods, taking readings.

The work of dispatchers can be very hectic when many calls come in at the same time. The job of public-safety dispatcher is particularly stressful because a slow or an improper response to a call can result in serious injury or further harm. Also, callers who are anxious or afraid may become excited and be unable to provide needed information; some may even become abusive. Despite provocations, dispatchers must remain calm, objective, and in control of the situation.

Dispatchers sit for long periods, using telephones, computers, and two-way radios. Much of their time is spent at video display terminals, viewing monitors and observing traffic patterns. As a result of working for long stretches with computers and other elec-

tronic equipment, dispatchers can experience significant eyestrain and back discomfort. Generally, dispatchers work a 40-hour week; however, rotating shifts and compressed work schedules are common. Alternative work schedules are necessary to accommodate evening, weekend, and holiday work, as well as 24-hour-per-day, 7-day-per-week operations.

Other workers in this group—cargo and freight agents; shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks; stock clerks and order fillers; production, planning, and expediting clerks; and weighers, measurers, checkers, and samplers—work in a wide variety of businesses, institutions, and industries. Some work in warehouses, stockrooms, or shipping and receiving rooms that may not be temperature controlled. Others may spend time in cold storage rooms or outside on loading platforms, where they are exposed to the weather.

Production, planning, and expediting clerks work closely with supervisors who must approve production and work schedules. Most jobs for shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks, stock clerks and order fillers, and cargo and freight agents involve frequent standing, bending, walking, and stretching. Some lifting and carrying of smaller items also may be involved. Although automated devices have lessened the physical demands of this occupation, their use remains somewhat limited. The work still can be strenuous, even though mechanical material-handling equipment is employed to move heavy items.

The typical workweek is Monday through Friday; however, evening and weekend hours are common in some jobs, such as stock clerks and order fillers in retail trade and couriers and messengers, and may be required in other jobs when large shipments are involved or when inventory is taken.

## Employment

In 2002, material-recording, -scheduling, -dispatching, and -distributing workers held about 4 million jobs, distributed among detailed occupations as follows:

Stock clerks and order fillers .....	1,628,000
Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks .....	803,000
Postal service mail carriers .....	334,000
Production, planning, and expediting clerks .....	288,000
Postal service mail sorters, processors, and processing machine operators .....	253,000
Dispatchers, except police, fire, and ambulance .....	170,000
Couriers and messengers .....	132,000
Police, fire, and ambulance dispatchers .....	92,000
Weighers, measurers, checkers, and samplers, recordkeeping .....	81,000
Postal service clerks .....	77,000
Cargo and freight agents .....	59,000
Meter readers, utilities .....	54,000
All other material recording, scheduling, dispatching, and distributing workers .....	34,000

About 86 percent of material-recording, -scheduling, -dispatching, and -distributing jobs were in the service-providing sector. Most of the rest were in manufacturing. Although workers in these jobs are found throughout the country, most work near population centers where retail stores, warehouses, factories, and large communications centers are concentrated.

## Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Many material-recording, -scheduling, -dispatching, and -distributing occupations are at the entry level and do not require more than a high school diploma. Employers, however, prefer to hire those familiar with computers and other electronic office and business equipment. Applicants who have taken business courses or have previ-

ous business, dispatching, or specific job-related experience may be preferred. Because communication with other people is an integral part of some jobs in the occupation, good oral and written communications skills are essential. Typing, filing, recordkeeping, and other clerical skills also are important.

State or local government civil-service regulations usually govern police, fire, emergency medical, and ambulance dispatching jobs. Candidates for these positions may have to pass written, oral, and performance tests. Also, they may be asked to attend training classes and attain the proper certification in order to qualify for advancement.

Workers usually develop the necessary skills on the job. This informal training lasts from several days to a few months, depending on the complexity of the job. Dispatchers usually require the most extensive training. Working with an experienced dispatcher, they monitor calls and learn how to operate a variety of communications equipment, including telephones, radios, and various wireless devices. As trainees gain confidence, they begin to handle calls themselves. In smaller operations, dispatchers sometimes act as customer service representatives, processing orders. Many public-safety dispatchers also participate in structured training programs sponsored by their employer. Increasingly, public-safety dispatchers receive training in stress and crisis management, as well as family counseling. Employers are recognizing the toll this work has on daily living and the potential impact that stress has on the job, on the work environment, and in the home.

Communication skills and the ability to work under pressure are important personal qualities for dispatchers. Residency in the city or county of employment frequently is required for public-safety dispatchers. Dispatchers in transportation industries must be able to deal with sudden influxes of shipments and disruptions of shipping schedules caused by bad weather, road construction, or accidents.

Although there are no mandatory licensing or certification requirements, some States require that public-safety dispatchers possess a certificate to work on a State network, such as the Police Information Network. The Association of Public Safety Communications Officials, International and the National Academies of Emergency Dispatch offer certification programs. Many dispatchers participate in these programs in order to improve their prospects for career advancement.

Couriers and messengers usually learn on the job, training with a veteran for a short time. Those who work as independent contractors for a messenger or delivery service may be required to have a valid driver's license, a registered and inspected vehicle, a good driving record, and insurance coverage. Many couriers and messengers who are employees, rather than independent contractors, also are required to provide and maintain their own vehicle. Although some companies have spare bicycles or mopeds that their riders may rent for a short period, almost all two-wheeled couriers own their own bicycle, moped, or motorcycle. A good knowledge of the geographic area in which they travel, as well as a good sense of direction, also are important.

Utility meter readers usually work with a more experienced meter reader until they feel comfortable doing the job on their own. They learn how to read the meters and determine the consumption rate. They also must learn the route that they need to travel in order to read all their customers' meters.

Production, planning, and expediting clerks; weighers, measurers, checkers, and samplers; stock clerks and order fillers; and shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks usually learn the job by doing routine tasks under close supervision. They learn how to count and mark stock, and then they start keeping records and taking inventory. Strength, stamina, good eyesight, and an ability to work at

repetitive tasks, sometimes under pressure, are important characteristics. Production, planning, and expediting clerks must learn both how their company operates and the company's priorities before they can begin to write production and work schedules efficiently. Stock clerks, whose sole responsibility is to bring merchandise to the sales floor to stock shelves and racks, need little training. Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks and stock clerks and order fillers who handle jewelry, liquor, or drugs may be bonded.

Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks, as well as cargo and freight agents, start out by checking items to be shipped and then attaching labels to them and making sure that the addresses are correct. Training in the use of automated equipment usually is done informally, on the job. As these occupations become more automated, however, workers in them may need longer periods of training in order to master the use of the equipment.

Advancement opportunities for material-recording, -scheduling, -dispatching, and -distributing workers vary with the place of employment. Dispatchers who work for private firms, which usually are small, will find few opportunities for advancement. In contrast, public-safety dispatchers may become a shift or divisional supervisor or chief of communications, or they may move to higher paying administrative jobs. Some become police officers or firefighters. Couriers and messengers—especially those who work for messenger or courier services—have limited advancement opportunities; a small fraction move into the office to learn dispatching or to take service requests by phone. In large firms, stock clerks can advance to invoice clerk, stock control clerk, or procurement clerk. Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks are promoted to head clerk, and those with a broad understanding of shipping and receiving may enter a related field, such as industrial traffic management. With additional training, some stock clerks and order fillers and shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks advance to jobs as warehouse manager or purchasing agent.

## Job Outlook

Overall employment of material-recording, -scheduling, -dispatching, and -distributing workers is expected to show little or no change through 2012. However, numerous job openings will arise each year from the need to replace workers who leave this very large occupational group.

Projected employment growth varies by detailed occupation. Meter readers will experience a decline in employment due to automated meter reading systems that greatly increase productivity. New technologies will enable stock clerks and order fillers to handle more stock, resulting in declining employment in this occupation as well. The use of e-mail and fax will contribute to slow growth for couriers and messengers. Employment of shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks also will grow more slowly than average due to the increasing use of automated devices and systems that enable these workers to handle materials and shipments more efficiently and more accurately.

Employment of dispatchers; production, planning, and expediting clerks; weighers, measurers, checkers, and samplers; and cargo and freight agents is projected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through 2012. Population growth, as well as an expanded role for dispatchers stemming from advances in telecommunications, should boost employment levels. Employment of production, planning, and expediting clerks and cargo and freight agents should benefit from more emphasis on efficiency in the production and shipping processes, while a growing need for accurate inventory records should spur employment of weighers, measurers, checkers, and samplers.

## Earnings

Earnings of material-recording, -scheduling, -dispatching, and -distributing occupations vary somewhat by occupation and industry. The range of median hourly earnings in 2002 is shown in the following tabulation:

Production, planning, and expediting clerks .....	\$16.18
Cargo and freight agents .....	15.10
Dispatchers, except police, fire, and ambulance .....	14.56
Meter readers, utilities .....	13.86
Police, fire, and ambulance dispatchers .....	13.30
Weighers, measurers, checkers, and samplers, recordkeeping .....	11.62
Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks .....	11.26
Couriers and messengers .....	9.32
Stock clerks and order fillers .....	9.26
All other material recording, scheduling, dispatching, and distributing workers .....	12.45

Workers in material-recording, -scheduling, -dispatching, and -distributing occupations usually receive the same benefits as most other workers. If uniforms are required, employers generally provide them or offer an allowance to purchase them.

The sections that follow provide more information on cargo and freight agents; couriers and messengers; dispatchers; meter readers, utilities; production, planning, and expediting clerks; shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks; stock clerks and order fillers; and weighers, measurers, checkers, and samplers.